

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

A SYSTEM FOR FEEDING PORTIONS OF MATERIAL TO AN INJECTION MOLDING MACHINE

5 [0001] This is a continuation of U.S. application No.
10/386,472, filed on March 13, 2003, which is a continuation
of U.S. Application No. 09/751,560, filed on January 2, 2001.

FIELD AND BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 [0002] The present invention relates to a field of a
molding machine and, in particular, concerned to a system for
feeding portions of material to a plastic-injection molding
machine.

15 [0003] Several weight feeding apparatus and systems are
known. These apparatus and systems are for feeding a large
quantity of material. When a small quantity is needed, e.g.,
coloring material, in a producing system, volume methods are
used to achieve the needed weight. Volume methods are used
for feeding small quantities because of the difficulty of
20 weighing a few grams in the production area, which is very
noisy and shaky.

 [0004] Volume feeding methods, which are used to achieve
weight feeding, have some disadvantages. The specific gravity
of a material can be changed e.g., in a new production batch,

and therefore a new scaling is needed. The volume-weight scaling is a long process and requires skilled workers. Moreover, since the fed volume cannot be controlled the volume-feeding method assumes that the feeder dispenses equal portions permanently and therefore ignores the material streaming problems.

[0005] Feeding hopper usually has an outlet to feed the material. Part of the material, the material in the shaft that is perpendicular to the outlet, does not press on the hopper. This "outlet-shaft" causes an error in the hopper weighing since the material in the outlet-shaft or at least part of this material is not weighed. Load cells are calibrated when weighing such hoppers.

[0006] There is therefore a recognized need for, and it would be highly advantageous to have, a system for feeding portions of material to an injection-molding machine with the ability to accurately weigh feeding of small quantities of material.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] The present invention is a system for feeding portions of material to an injection-molding machine with the ability to accurately weigh feeding of small quantities of material.

[0008] According to the teachings of the present invention there is provided, a system for feeding portions of material to an injection molding-machine including (a) a feeding means; (b) a container, with a fill opening and an outlet, and the
5 container is installed with the feeding means; (c) a material hopper, with a fill opening and an outlet, and the material hopper is located inside the container; (d) a load cell that is coupled to the material hopper, and (e) a controller operative for: (i) calculating the weight of fed material,
10 using the load cell and loss-in-weight method, and (ii) controlling the feeding means.

[0009] According to further features in the described preferred embodiments, the material hopper of the system has a funnel shaped lower part and an upper part and wherein the
15 upper part has the same cross- section-area in each vertical level. The upper part of the material hopper can have inclined parallel-walls.

[0010] According to further features in the described preferred embodiments, the controller of the system is further
20 operative for command the feeding means to dispense at least one portion of material from the material hopper, wherein each portion is dispensed in a given time and for a given interval of time in order to dispense portions with a predetermined weight.

[0011] According to further features in the described preferred embodiments, the controller is further operative for it calculates the weight of the dispensed portion by (1) dispensing a number of portions; (2) calculating the weight of the number of portions, using loss-in-weight method, and (3) dividing the weight of the number of portions to the number of the portions.

[0012] According to further features in the described preferred embodiments, the feeding means is a screw feeder and the controller is further operative for adjusting the weight of the further portion by increasing or decreasing the spin speed of the screw feeder, if the weight of the portion differs from the predetermined weight.

[0013] According to further features in the described preferred embodiments, the outlet of the material hopper is shifted and elevated from the outlet of the container.

[0014] According to yet another aspect of the present invention there is provided a material hopper for accurate weighing including (a) a funnel shaped lower part with outlet, and (b) a parallel or cylinder walls upper part wherein the walls can be inclined.

[0015] According to yet another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of accurate weighing of a fed portion including (a) storing the material in a material

hopper that it's upper part is an inclined cylinder or an inclined parallel walls; (b) feeding a predetermined number of portions; (c) calculating the weight of the number of portions, using loss-in-weight of the material hopper using a load cell, and (d) calculating the weight of each portion of the number of portions by dividing the weight of the number of portions to the number of the number of portions. The predetermined number of portions can be calculating by dividing the sensitivity of the load cell to the estimated weight of the fed portion.

[0016] The present invention successfully addresses the shortcomings of the existing technologies by providing a system for feeding portions of material to an injection-molding machine with the ability to accurately weigh feeding of small quantities of material.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0017] In the drawings:

[0018] Figure 1 is an illustration of a schematic block diagram of the system.

[0019] Figure 2 is an illustration of a systems' cross-section while material is in the material hopper and the system is in a work or ready to work position.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0020] The present invention is a system for feeding portions of material to an injection-molding machine with the ability to accurately weigh feeding of small quantities of material.

[0021] The principles and operation of the system according to the present invention may be better understood with reference to the drawings and the accompanying description.

[0022] As used herein in the specification and in the claims section that follows, the term "loss-in-weight" refers to a known method for weighing the material that has been dispensed or spent from a hopper, by weighing the hopper before taking from it having a pre-dispensing weight and secondly weighing the hopper after taking from it having an after-dispensing weight then obtaining a weight-loss of the hopper, which is the weight of the taken material, by subtracting the after-dispensing weight from the pre-dispensing-weight.

[0023] As used herein in the specification and in the claims section that follows, the term "outlet-shaft" refers to the part of the material in a hopper that is located in the shaft that extends perpendicularly to the outlet of the hopper and do not press on the hopper walls.

[0024] Referring now to the drawings, Figure 1 illustrates a schematic block diagram of the system. The system includes a container **10**, a material hopper **11** located inside the container **10**, a load cell **16** coupled to the material hopper **11**, a controller **13** that calculates weight according to the load cell **16** information and commands the motor **14** of the screw feeder **12** to dispense portions of material into the molding-machine **15**.

[0025] The upper part of the hopper **11** has inclined walls. This shape enables to keep the material in the outlet-shaft, constant by keeping minimal level of material in the hopper. Moreover, the walls of the upper part of the hopper **11** are parallel, for this reason the shape of each new space in the hopper **11** that is created by each dispensed portion. Therefore the profile of the material-pressure, in the hopper **11**, remains constant. The inclined and parallel walls of the hopper **11** minimize the weight errors and facilitate the weight calibration.

[0026] The material must be fed to the molding machine in accurate-weight portions and each portion must be fed in a given time and in a given duration. To achieve this target the controller **13** commands the motor **14** of the screw feeder **12** to start rotating in a specific spin in the given time for a given duration. Since the given time and duration of feeding

are given by the molding machine **15**, the screw feeder **12** spin is the only variable that can be used to control the weight of the fed portion. In the first time, the controller **13** gets a first weight of the hopper **11** from the load cell **16** and
5 commands the motor **14** to rotate the screw feeder **12** for the given duration and a given spin that is predetermined by the system operator. After dispensing a predetermined number of portions the controller **13** gets a second weight of the hopper **11**. The controller **13** obtains the total weight of the fed
10 portions using the first weight of the hopper **11**, the second weight of the hopper **11** and loss-in-weight method. The controller **13** obtains the portion weight by dividing the total weight to the number of fed portions. If the portion weight differs from a predetermined weight, the controller **13** adjusts
15 the portion weight by increasing or decreasing the spin of the motor **14** of the screw feeder **12**, in the next set of portions. This process can be done sequentially or in a predetermined time.

[0027] Figure 2 illustrates the cross-section of the system
20 while material is in the material hopper and the system is in a work or ready to work position. The material **17** fills the material hopper **11**. The material **17** is fed through an outlet **18** of the material hopper **11** to a space **19** created between outlet **23** of the material hopper and an outlet **20** of the

container **10**, from this space **19** the material **17** is fed through the outlet **20** of the container to the screw feeder **12**. The outlet **18** of the material hopper is shifted from the outlet **20** of the container to enable keeping the outlet-shaft **21** constant as long as the material level **22** is higher than the upper end of the outlet-shaft **21** and isolates the material hopper **11** from noise and shaking which is coming from the screw feeder **12** and its motor **14**. The controller **13** commands a refill means **23** to refill the material hopper **11** when the material level **22** reduced to a threshold level. Part of the material **17** is located in the space **19** and acts as a buffer. This buffer isolates the material hopper **11** and prevents noises and shakings of the screw feeder **12** and its motor **14**, to enable an accurate weighing of the material hopper **11** by the load cell **16**.

[0028] It will be appreciated that the above descriptions are intended only to serve as examples, and that many other embodiments are possible within the spirit and the scope of the present invention.